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MARTIN WARE

Martin Ware is the name given to the highly distinctive salt-glazed stoneware produced by the Martin Brothers at Fulham and at Southall, Middlesex, between the years 1873 and 1914. In their methods of production and in their attitude towards their work the brothers could well be considered to be the first 'Studio Potters' of the modern English school. Their ceramic output was extensive and the items which they produced covered a wide range; from large architectural fittings, tiles, fireplaces and fountains to delicate vases, ornamental ware and chessmen.

There were four brothers involved in this manufacture; Robert Wallace Martin (1843–1923), Charles Douglas Martin (1846–1910), Walter Frazer Martin (1859–1912) and Edwin Bruce Martin (1860–1915). They were born in London, although their father originally came from Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk, and their mother's Scottish origin is reflected in their Christian names. The pottery was the result of a close combination of the brothers' various talents. They worked as a team, with the eldest brother Robert—usually called Wallace Martin—as the founder, leading figure and sculptor of the group.

Wallace, from an early age, had shown great ability as a sculptor and had in his youth attended the Lambeth School of Art and the Royal Academy Schools, as well as working in the studio of the sculptor Alexander Munro, and, for a time, being employed as a stone carver on the rebuilding of the Palace of Westminster. This latter task had been most important in his development as an artist, and at this time he must have seen the large collection of plaster casts of Gothic carving which Pugin had formed as a guide to the workmen employed on the building. The influence of this Gothic decoration and in particular the grotesque treatment of gargoyles and corbels greatly affected Wallace, as can be seen in all the figures, face-jugs, birds and chessmen which he later produced in ceramic form.

Walter Martin was the key figure in the pottery from the chemical and technical viewpoint. He was responsible for the mixing of the clays and glazes, and for the firing, cooling and drawing of the kilns. When he was quite young he had worked for a short time at Doulton's Pottery in Lambeth and he rapidly became a very fine 'thrower' of pots. He made all the larger vases produced by the brothers.

Edwin had also worked for a brief period at Doulton's, where he learned the art of incising pottery, and painted decoration. He shaped many of the very small Martin Ware vases but it was the surface design—the finely drawn flowers and grasses, the strange birds and fishes, and the rich gourd-like textures—in which he greatly excelled.

Charles, the remaining brother, had also originally assisted with the work of decoration, but he very soon took over the administrative side of the business. He handled the sales of the pottery and, from 1878 to his death in 1910, he managed the London showroom which the brothers leased at 16 Brownlow Street, Holborn.

The firm of R. W. Martin (the '& Brothers' was to be added later) was founded by Wallace in 1873, when he moved the whole of his family to Pomona House in Fulham. At first he was assisted in the work only by Walter, who was still very young, and their pieces were fired in the kilns of the nearby Fulham Pottery, which was then being run by Mr C. J. C. Bailey. The earliest piece in this exhibition is a jug (3769–1901) which comes from this period and is in Case 1. The following year the arrangement with the Fulham Pottery ceased and the brothers hired a disused glass kiln for firing their work. However, this too proved to be only a temporary measure, for the owner of the kiln used it himself on one occasion to fire glass crucibles without telling the brothers, and this caused the whole of their next firing to miscarry, ruining several months of their work and practically bringing them to bankruptcy.

In 1877, with the aid of Mr Frederick Nettlefold, who was one of their earliest and most helpful patrons, the firm found new premises in a derelict soap factory in Havelock Road, Southall

Green, Middlesex. It was near to the Grand Junction Canal (now called the Grand Union Canal) and this was to prove very useful for the movement of their raw materials and of their finished work. Then, in 1878, once again with Mr Nettlefold's assistance, they opened their London shop in Brownlow Street. Up to this time their sales had been made by Wallace, who had carried a large carpet-bag full of their wares around the City.

The firm now settled down at Southall and, with Charles controlling the shop in Holborn, the other three brothers continued to experiment with, and perfect the techniques of, the difficult art of salt-glazed stoneware. The early 'Gothic' style of their pots gave way in the early 1880s to shapes and decoration based on designs of the Italian Renaissance, with formalized flower and leaf scrolls, masks and grotesques. There are several examples of this style in Case 1 of this exhibition.

By the mid-1880s another form of decoration, based on the wild flowers, reeds and grasses of the canal banks, came to the fore in their work, and this too was joined by a more humorous motif of extraordinary birds and fishes. Edwin's genius for decoration flourished, and his designs now included a strong Japanese influence, with writhing dragons and sea monsters, and his flowers became more exotic, turning to orchids and lilies. Fine floral designs are shown in Case 3 of this exhibition, while Case 4 contains examples of the bird and fish decorations. About this time the brothers trained and employed Walter Edward Willey to assist them with their work and in particular with the decoration.

Throughout all the various changes of design Wallace himself continued to produce a superb collection of 'grotesques'—birds with moveable heads, impish bandsmen, jugs with wonderfully animated faces on their sides, and powerful character studies from the novels of Charles Dickens. Examples of all these can be seen in Case 2 of this exhibition, together with a very fine chess set of individually modelled pieces.

The brothers' work was to include one more major change in style. In the year 1900 they visited the Paris Exhibition and saw there many designs based on the stylized organic forms which were then so popular in the continental Art Nouveau. On their return they began to produce vases and bowls inspired by the forms of marrows, gourds and melons, and they developed a brilliant new range of surface textures often imitating the skins of fish or lizards. These new pieces, considered by many to be the finest work of their career, were largely the achievements of Edwin and Walter. Case 5 of this exhibition shows the quality of their work at this period, when they were at the height of their powers.

Then, in 1910, there was a serious fire in the shop at Brownlow Street. Much of the work there was ruined and Charles Martin, who was in the building at the time, never really recovered from the shock of the event. He died in the June of that year. Only two years later, in 1912, Walter too died suddenly of a cerebral haemorrhage. This was a particularly damaging blow to the remaining brothers, as Walter had been the only one who knew the technical details necessary for producing their wares. They struggled on but only fired a few small, less important pieces, and they finally closed the London shop in May 1914. Edwin now developed cancer of the mouth, and he died in April 1915 bringing the activities of the firm to a close. Robert Wallace Martin, the eldest and last of the brothers, died at Southall on 10 July 1923.

During their lifetime they were never particularly successful, nor were they ever financially prosperous. We can now recognize their work as one of the most inspired ceramic ventures of the nineteenth century.

D. R. Coschworth

Case 1

Jug, stoneware, with impressed and incised decoration. Partly coloured light brown and blue. Dated and inscribed '2 74 R. W. Martin, Fulham'. 3769–1901

Pair of wall-brackets, stoneware. Shield-shaped with brown, and dark blue glaze. Dated and inscribed '3–1877 R. W. Martin, London'. Circ.346 & a–1971

Tobacco jar and cover, stoneware. The cover modelled with a hound emerging from a basket. Dated and inscribed '11–1877 R. W. Martin, Southall'. Circ.347 & a–1971

Vase, stoneware. Decorated with stylized leaf scrolls on a dark brown ground. Dated and inscribed '3–1886 R. W. Martin & Bros, London & Southall'. 369–1888

Shallow vase, stoneware. Decorated with scrolls and vertical lines on a light brown ground. Dated and inscribed '8–1886 R. W. Martin & Bros, London & Southall'. 371–1888

Vase, stoneware with a wooden base. Decorated with flower and leaf scrolls on a dark brown ground. Dated and inscribed '9–1886 R. W. Martin & Bros, London & Southall'. c.1154 & a–1917

Vase and cover, stoneware. Decorated with dark green leaf scrolls on a light ground. Dated and inscribed '10–1887 R. W. Martin & Bros, London & Southall'. c.1153 & a–1917

Lamp base, stoneware. Decorated with grotesques and scrolls on a dark brown ground. Dated and inscribed '4–1892 R. W. Martin & Bros, London & Southall'. c.405 & a–c–1918

Case 2

Grotesque bird with moveable head, stoneware. Dated and inscribed '1–1887 R. Wallace Martin Sc. Southall '87'. c.1151 & a–1917

Owl with moveable head, stoneware. Dated and inscribed '3–1899 R. W. Martin & Bros, London & Southall'. c.492 & a–1919

Bird with moveable head, stoneware. Dated and inscribed '11–1903 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. Circ.442 & a–1919

Figure of a 'thrower', stoneware. Dated and inscribed '12–1900 RWM Southall'. Circ.343–1958

Figure of an imp playing castanets, stoneware. Probably about 1890. Circ.443–1919

Figure of an imp playing pipes, stoneware. Probably about 1890. Inscribed 'Martin Bros, London'. Circ.444–1919

Plaque, stoneware, 1885. 'Quilp': the character from the novel *The Old Curiosity Shop* by Charles Dickens. c.1152–1917

Set of chessmen, stoneware. With various dating in the second half of 1902. Inscribed 'R. W. Martin & Bros, London & Southall'. c.211a–ff–1921

Double-faced jug, stoneware. Dated and inscribed '1–1900 R. W. Martin & Bros, London & Southall'. c.493–1919

Case 3

Vase, stoneware. Decorated with an incised design of floral arabesques on a brown ground. Dated and inscribed '1–1887 R. W. Martin & Bros, London & Southall'. 367–1888

Vase, stoneware. Decorated with an incised design of floral arabesques on a buff ground. Dated and inscribed '2–1887 R. W. Martin & Bros, London & Southall'. 372–1888

Jug, stoneware. Decorated with reeds and grasses on a buff ground. Dated and inscribed '3–1887 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. 373–1888

Large vase, stoneware. Decorated with orchids on a buff ground. Dated and inscribed '2–1889 R. W. Martin & Bros, London & Southall'. Circ.467–1962

Vase, stoneware, 1886. Decorated with lilies on a brown ground. Inscribed 'R. W. Martin & Bros, London & Southall'. 370–1888

Vase, stoneware. Decorated with poppy seeds and stems on a red-brown ground. Dated and inscribed '10–1907 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. Circ.424–1919

Vase, stoneware. Decorated with orchids on a dark brown lustrous ground. Dated and inscribed '5–1899 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. c.464–1919

Case 4

Vase, stoneware. Decorated with birds and fishes on a buff ground. Dated and inscribed '11–1889 R. W. Martin & Bros, London & Southall'. Circ.470–1962

Small vase, stoneware. Decorated with four birds on a red-brown ground. Dated and inscribed '12–1906 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. c.480–1919

Small vase, stoneware. Decorated with birds and reeds on a cream ground. Dated and inscribed '9–1904 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. c.883–1917

Small vase, stoneware. Decorated with birds and reeds on a pink ground. Dated and inscribed '9–1904 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. c.871–1917

Vase, stoneware. Decorated with fish and weeds on a light brown ground. Dated and inscribed '6–1901 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. c.475–1919

Small vase, stoneware. Decorated with fish on a dark green ground. Dated and inscribed '9–1904 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. c.881–1917

Small vase, stoneware. Decorated with fish on a light green ground. Dated and inscribed '9–1904 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. c.888–1917

Small vase, stoneware. Decorated with fish on a blue-green ground. Dated and inscribed '3–1904 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. c.890–1917

Small vase, stoneware. Decorated with fish on a light green ground. Dated and inscribed '3–1904 Martin Bros, London'. c.876–1917

Small vase, stoneware, about 1904. Decorated with fish on a blue and brown ground. Inscribed 'Martin Bros, London & Southall'. c.873–1917

Large vase, stoneware. Decorated with winged monsters on a mottled green, blue and grey ground. Dated and inscribed '5–1899 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. Circ.416–1919

Large vase, stoneware. Decorated with brown dragons on a mottled white ground. Dated and inscribed '3–1902 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. c.469–1919

Vase, stoneware. Decorated with fish on a buff-grey ground. Dated and inscribed '3–1904 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. c.892–1917

Dish, stoneware, about 1900. Decorated with a fish and scrolled reeds on a blue ground. Inscribed 'Martin Bros, London & Southall'. c.1156–1917

Vase, stoneware. Decorated with brown fish on a dark green ground. Dated and inscribed '3–1904 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. c.897–1917

Vase, stoneware. Decorated with fish on a mottled blue and brown ground. Dated and inscribed '10–1901 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. Circ.428–1919

Vase, stoneware. Decorated with brown fish on a green ground. Dated and inscribed '4–1904 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. c.896–1917

Vase, stoneware. Decorated with grotesque frogs on a brown ground. Dated and inscribed '6–1903 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. Circ.426–1919

Case 5

Vase, stoneware. Ribbed and mottled green and blue. Dated and inscribed '11–1903 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. c.468–1919

Vase, stoneware. Ribbed, with dark green glaze. Dated and inscribed '3–1909 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. Circ.418–1919

Vase, stoneware. Ribbed, with light green glaze. Dated and inscribed '3–1909 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. c.467–1919

Bowl, stoneware. Light brown with blue spots of glaze. Dated and inscribed '11–1906 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. Circ.439–1919

Small vase, stoneware. Partly coloured blue and brown. Dated and inscribed '12–1901 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. c.490–1919

Small vase, stoneware. Buff with dark brown decoration. Dated and inscribed '2–1906 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. c.476–1919

Small vase, stoneware. Ribbed, with dark green and buff decoration. Dated and inscribed '9–1904 EBM (Edwin Bruce Martin) Martin Bros, London & Southall'. c.486–1919

Vase, stoneware. Mottled green and white decoration. Dated and inscribed '10–1905 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. c.481–1919

Small vase, stoneware. With a dark green matt glaze. Dated and inscribed '12–1905 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. c.874–1917

Small vase, stoneware. Ribbed, with a light green decoration. Dated and inscribed '6–1903 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. c.894–1917

Small vase, stoneware. Ribbed, with a dark and light brown spotted decoration. Dated and inscribed '3–1907 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. Circ.436–1919

Small vase, stoneware, probably 1912. Partly coloured buff and brown, with dented sides. Inscribed '12 G Martin, London'. c.889–1917

Vase, stoneware. Ribbed, with a dark brown, lustrous glaze. Dated and inscribed '12–1908 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. c.470–1919

Vase, stoneware. Ribbed, with a dark and light brown lustrous glaze. Dated and inscribed '1–1902 Martin Bros, London & Southall'. Circ.420–1919

Extract from a description of a visit made to the pottery in January 1890, published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* later that year:

'Their kiln, which stands about a hundred yards from the Grand Junction Canal, is built within an irregular-looking building of stone, cement, brick, iron and wood; the shaft, which juts out from the centre of the roof for several feet, and the vaporous smoke, which rolls away before the wind to join the scudding clouds, being the only outward and visible signs of its inward fiery presence. On the threshold I met Mr. R. W. Martin, who at once led the way into the kiln. The heat was so terrific that the atmosphere appeared to be glassy and wavy. Two men stripped to the shirt, and with bared arms and throats, were leaning against the wall, the one resting on a long iron rod and the other on a coalheaver's shovel. They were grimed with smoke, and dust and clay, perspiration trickled down their arms and faces like rain on the panes of a window, black beads of perspiration clung to their swarthy throats, their hair was matted and their voices were as the voices of men in the Sahara Desert. The elder of the two, who had entire charge of the kiln, was Walter Martin and the younger, who was assisting him, was his brother Edwin. They had both been at work in that building, turn and turn about, since Thursday midday, and for the last twenty hours Edwin Martin had never left the fires. 'How can you stand this fearful heat?' I asked. They said that it was 'nothing', and Walter Martin, after having cautioned me to 'stand by,' opened the door of one of the fires directly opposite to where I was standing, and said, 'Now that is heat'. It was indeed; he closed the door again in an instant, but not before I felt as though I had been done through and through. Then they began to coal up for the last time before salting off. Each of the five doors at the base of the kiln was opened in quick succession and large logs of wood and shovels of coal thrown in to feed the fire. Each time a door was opened the heat became well-nigh unbearable—the wooden beams and rafters became so hot that I could scarcely bear to touch them, and iron girders and binders warped like warm sealing-wax. Next they mounted a narrow flight of stairs leading to the floor above, from whence they stoked the kiln in five more places, but there the heat was not so fierce. At the base of the kiln it was impossible to get more than about four feet distant from the fires; neither was it possible to stand upright, because the beams and rafters of the floor above were not more than about five feet from the ground, while upstairs there was plenty of breathing space. As Walter Martin went from firehole to firehole I noticed that he limped painfully; an iron lean-to had fallen overnight, he told me, and struck his foot a crushing blow, and what with the heat and the continual exertion it had gradually become extremely painful. As time wore on the heat grew more intense. The beams and rafters scorched and blackened and had to be drenched with salt and water to prevent them from bursting into flames. I looked into the kiln from above, while the salt was being put in to glaze the pottery, and saw the raging fury of the flames in all their gorgeous splendour . . . . And there, within that living hell, splendid examples of the potter's skill were being fired without protection of any kind. While others protect their wares with 'saggers' or 'slugs' these potters are content to trust theirs to the most terrible of the elements *in puris naturalibus*. How they can have the courage to run the risk is almost inconceivable. Meantime Walter Martin's foot became worse, and he had to be provided with a stick to lean on while he worked with his right hand; and, finally, a pair of crutches were procured for him from a neighbouring cottage. He grew anxious. He had packed the kiln, and only he could fire it off. If an accident happened, or if an error of judgment were committed, four months' work might, and probably would, be either destroyed or rendered valueless. But he stuck to his post like a man, and, although occasionally he groaned aloud with agony, he resolutely went round and round the fires, up stairs and down again, shovelled the salt in, tried his proofs, had the fires once more renewed and superintended the pugging of the fireholes to exclude the draught. Then, his labours having for the time being come to an end—for it takes five days for the kiln to cool—he was carried by his brothers in to the cottage, his foot was dressed, and he was wheeled home on a tricycle to sleep the sleep of the brave and the just.'

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